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ABSTRACT

In Spring 2001, Erikson Institute conducted two surveys to provide practical information on the current state of expert opinion and public practice with regard to the assessment of prekindergarten children. The first survey questioned a select group of 25 national leaders in the early childhood field regarding the most important components of a child assessment system for 4-year-olds enrolled in Head Start or similar programs. The second study surveyed state-funded prekindergarten programs across the country regarding specific assessment practices mandated, recommended, or commonly used in their classroom. The national leader survey found strong agreement that the most important aspect of an assessment system is the link between curriculum and the assessment of child skills and knowledge. Weekly teacher meetings where assessment can be discussed and annual or semiannual program self-evaluations ranked next highest in importance. Parent involvement in the assessment process, annual developmental screening, and child portfolios were also considered to be particularly useful. Teacher checklists were seen as moderately important. Expert opinion was divided regarding the utility of anecdotal records, as well as the use of standardized achievement tests for program accountability. There was no support for using these tests to assess individual children. The state prekindergarten survey found that almost 70 percent of the 36 existing state-funded prekindergarten programs mandate, recommend, or commonly use developmentally appropriate informal assessment techniques. This represents a significant change from the mid-1990s, when only one state was developing guidelines or instruments based on these methods. Eight states mandate relatively elaborate assessment systems, which require the use of at least two informal assessment tools or require training in these techniques. Twelve states leave assessment decisions entirely to the local level. Seventy-five percent of the 24 states that do not leave assessment decisions to the local level report that they regularly use portfolios, checklists, and anecdotal records. Only 56 percent, however, report that curriculum and assessment are

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systematically linked. Even fewer (25 percent) report that parent involvement, teacher meetings, and program self-evaluation form a part of their assessment system. These findings suggest that while knowledge of developmentally appropriate assessment practices has significantly increased, there is still widespread lack of understanding that assessment must be understood as a comprehensive system, which is linked to the curriculum and supported by appropriate strategies and resources. (Author)

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Occasional Paper

Child Assessment at the Preprimary Level:

Expert opinion and state trends

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Carol Horton and Barbara T. Bowman

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: In spring 2001, Erikson Institute conducted two surveys to provide practical information on the current state of expert opinion and public practice with regard to the assessment of prekindergarten children. The first survey questioned a select group of 25 national → continued

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← leaders in the early childhood field regarding the most important components of a child assessment system for four-year-olds enrolled in Head Start or similar programs. The second study surveyed state-funded prekindergarten programs across the country regarding specific assessment practices mandated, recommended, or commonly used in their classrooms.

The national leader survey found strong agreement that the most important aspect of an assessment system is the link between curriculum and the assessment of child skills and knowledge. Weekly teacher meetings where assessment can be discussed and annual or semiannual program self-evaluations ranked next highest in importance. Parent involvement in the assessment process, annual developmental screening, and child portfolios were also considered to be particularly useful. Teacher checklists were seen as moderately important. Expert opinion was divided regarding the utility of anecdotal records, as well as the use of standardized achievement tests for program accountability. There was no support for using these tests to assess individual children.

The state prekindergarten survey found that almost 70 percent of the 36 existing state-funded prekindergarten programs mandate, recommend, or commonly use developmentally appropriate informal assessment techniques. This represents a significant change from the mid-1990s, when only one state was developing guidelines or instruments based on these methods. Eight states mandate relatively elaborate assessment systems, which require the use of at least two informal assessment tools or require training in these techniques. Twelve states leave assessment decisions entirely to the local level.

Seventy-five percent of the 24 states that do not leave assessment decisions to the local level report that they regularly use portfolios, checklists, and anecdotal records. Only 56 percent, however, report that curriculum and assessment are systematically linked. Even fewer (25 percent) report that parent involvement, teacher meetings, and program self-evaluation form a part of their assessment system. These findings suggest that while knowledge of developmentally appropriate assessment practices has significantly increased, there is still a widespread lack of understanding that assessment must be understood as a comprehensive system, which is linked to the curriculum and supported by appropriate strategies and resources.

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CAROL HORTON, PH.D., is a research associate at Erikson Institute, where her work focuses on policy analysis and program evaluation. Prior to coming to Erikson in 1999, she worked as a research and writing consultant for foundations and nonprofit organizations, including Chapin Hall Center for Children, Ford Foundation, W. K. Kellogg Foundation, and Ms. Foundation for Women. Horton earned her doctorate in political science from the University of Chicago and has taught at Macalester College, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, University of Illinois at Chicago, and University of Chicago. She is the author or coauthor of numerous articles and reports. Her book on race and American liberalism is forthcoming from Oxford University Press.

BARBARA BOWMAN is a nationally known authority on early education and one of the three founders of Erikson Institute. An experienced preschool and primary teacher, Professor Bowman's interest areas are early education, cultural diversity, and education of at-risk children.

In addition to her teaching and administrative duties at Erikson, which have included terms as president, Bowman has directed a wide variety of practical projects. Among them are training programs for Head Start teachers and caregivers of infants at-risk for morbidity or mortality and a child development associate's program developed on Native American reservations. Her most recent work has been with the Chicago Public Schools providing in-service education for teachers in inner city neighborhoods.

Bowman has served on numerous professional boards, including the Family Resource Coalition and National Association for the Education of Young Children, of which she was president (1980–82). Currently she is on the boards of the Great Books Foundation, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and Roosevelt University. She has served on a variety of professional committees, including the Panel on Day Care Policy for the National Research Council, Leadership Initiative for the National Black Children Development Institute, Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children for the National Research Council, and Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education of the Illinois State Board of Education. She chaired the Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy for the National Research Council.

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In spring 2001, Erikson Institute conducted two surveys to provide practical information on the current state of expert opinion and public practice with regard to the assessment of prekindergarten children.[1] The first survey, addressed to a select group of national leaders in the early childhood field, asked, What, in your opinion, are the most important components of a child assessment system? The second, addressed to state-funded prekindergarten programs across the country, inquired, What, if any, are the specific assessment practices either required or commonly used in your program?[2]

The results of these surveys provide information on a wide range of assessment practices, including the use of developmental screening tests, standardized achievement tests, portfolios, checklists, observational records, worksheets, and parent evaluations. In addition, they examine the link between curriculum and assessment, and the role of a wide range of complementary activities, including the use of teacher meetings, consultants and case studies, and program self-study for assessment related purposes.

The resultant data provide newly detailed information on how national leaders in the early childhood field view assessment and assessment-related practices, and what state-funded prekindergarten programs across the country are doing to assess children. This information should be particularly useful to early childhood care and education programs that are seeking to establish or revise their child assessment system. It should also be of interest to a wide range of early childhood professionals. As the concern with preprimary assessment is likely to continue to grow, it is important to understand the current state of the field, and how assessment practices may best facilitate the learning and development of young children.

Growing Important of Preprimary Assessment

Several factors explain the growing emphasis placed on child assessment at the preprimary level. First, the number of children enrolled in early childhood care and education programs has more than tripled over the course of the last several decades. In 1965, for example, less than 20 percent of three- to four-year-old children were enrolled in such programs. By 1999, in contrast, 60 percent of children aged three to five who had not yet entered kindergarten attended day care centers, Head Start programs, preschools, nursery schools, prekindergarten, or another early childhood program.[3] This unprecedented expansion of early childhood programs has increased their societal significance, causing more people to be concerned about their real and perceived benefits and costs.

[1]We would like to thank the Chicago Department of Human Services for their support of this project. Thanks are also extended to the early childhood education experts and state specialists who took the time to respond to our surveys.

[2]These surveys were commissioned by the Chicago Department of Human Services to inform the development of a revised child assessment system for use in its Head Start and childcare programs.

[3]National Center for Education Statistics 2001, http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2001/section1/indicator01.html.

Second, the newfound understanding of the importance of early learning has underscored the importance of the educational component of these programs. As the National Research Council concluded in its recent study, *Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers*, the last 30 years of child development research demonstrate that "2- to 5-year-old year old children are more capable learners than had been imagined, and that their acquisition of linguistic, mathematical, and other skills relevant to school readiness is influenced (and can be improved) by their educational and developmental experiences during those years."[4] As this knowledge has diffused to the general public, policymakers and other influential professionals have become more concerned with the educational potential of early childhood programs, particularly with regard to low-income, disadvantaged, and/or physically or mentally disabled children.

Recent child development research indicates that quality preprimary education represents a particularly important resource for children who may lack a high quality educational environment or need special resources beyond what their parents can provide. It has been demonstrated that good preschool programs can help prevent or mitigate the development of learning difficulties and improve disadvantaged children's readiness for school.[5] Given that over 16 percent of American children live in poverty (11.6 million in 2000) and that over 8 percent are disabled, affordable quality programs have the potential to serve as an important avenue for positive social change.[6]

Finally, greater public spending on preprimary education has increased the demand for program accountability and measurable results. Although public investment in early childhood programs continues to fall far short of the need (Head Start, for example, still serves only about three out of five eligible children),[7] it has increased significantly in recent years. Federal spending on Head Start rose from $1.2 to $5.2 billion between 1989 and 2000, while the number of children enrolled increased from 450,970 to 857,664.[8] Similarly, state spending on prekindergarten initiatives expanded from $700 million to almost $1.7 billion during the 1990s, while the number of children participating in these programs grew from approximately 290,000 to 725,000.[9]

This combination of expanding enrollments, better scientific knowledge, and greater public spending has generated increased concern with child assessment and program evaluation at the preprimary level. The establishment of the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework represents the most important example of this trend. This measure requires that all Head Start programs collect child

[4] Barbara Bowman, M. Suzanne Donovan, and M. Susan Burns, eds., *Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2001), 25–8.

[5] Ibid., 28.

[6] Children's Defense Fund 2001, "Frequently Asked Questions about Child Poverty," *www.childrensdefense.org/fairstart-faqs.htm*; "The State of America's Children Yearbook 2001," *www.childrensdefense.org/keyfacts.htm*.

[7] Children's Defense Fund 2001, "Child Care Basics," *www.childrensdefense.org/cc_facts.htm*.

[8] "2001 Head Start Fact Sheet," Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *www2.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/hsb/about/fact2001.htm*, p. 5.

[9] Karen Schulman, Helen Blank, and Danielle Ewen, *Seeds of Success: State Prekindergarten Initiatives, 1998–1999* (Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund, 1999), viii, xx. (Available online at *www.childrensdefense.org/seeds of success.pdf*.) This figure includes prekindergarten initiatives beyond the specific classroom-based programs focused on in this paper.

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assessment data in eight specified domains of children's learning and development at least three times annually, beginning in the 2001–02 program year.[10] While grantee agencies retain considerable latitude regarding how to fulfill these requirements, they nonetheless represent a significant shift towards more comprehensive assessment practices. Given that Head Start has often been a trendsetter in the world of early childhood education, this development should strongly reinforce the trend towards more rigorous child assessment systems in other early childhood care and education programs.

The State of Expert Opinion

The perspective of leading voices in the early childhood field with regard to child assessment has shifted considerably in recent decades. Back in the early1980s, many early childhood experts opposed the establishment of general norms or standards against which individual learning and development could be measured, holding that they would not be appropriately sensitive to gender, cultural, and socioeconomic differences.[11] Around the same time, however, many kindergartens and elementary schools were sharply increasing their use of standardized tests in response to concern generated by the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, which emphasized the deficits of the public education system. The many negative unintended consequences of this move (e.g., distorted curricula and children who were inappropriately labeled, tracked, or retained) mobilized the early childhood community, spurring the development of newly detailed guidelines for developmentally appropriate assessment practices.

Consequently, in 1990 the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) issued a joint position statement which held that assessment should be integrated with the curriculum; beneficial to children, teachers, and parents; engaged with all learning and developmental domains; based on ongoing teacher observation; and primarily reliant on children's everyday activities. In addition, an assessment system should include a variety of tools and methods; recognize individual differences; emphasize children's competencies; and include parent-teacher communications.[12] In 1997, these principles were incorporated into NAEYC's revised guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs.[13]

This approach, commonly referred to as *informal assessment*, relies on nonintrusive methods of evaluating children's development and competencies in

[10] The eight domain elements are language, literacy, math, science, art, socioemotional, approaches to learning, and physical health and development. See U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Information Memorandum ACF-IM-HS-00-18, issued 8/10/2000, *www.headstartinfo.org/publications/im00/im00_18.htm*.

[11] See, for example, "Integrated Components of Appropriate and Inappropriate Practice for 4- and 5-Year-Old Children," *Young Children* 41, no. 6 (Sept. 1986), 23; "National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Position Statement on Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8," in Sue Bredekamp, ed., *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age*—Expanded Edition (Washington, DC: NAEYC, 1987), 13.

[12] "Guidelines for Appropriate Curriculum Content and Assessment in Programs Serving Children Ages 3 Through 8," in Sue Bredekamp and Teresa Rosegrant, eds., *Reaching Potentials: Appropriate Curriculum and Assessment for Young Children*, Volume 1 (Washington, DC: NAEYC, 1990), 23–24. (Available online at http://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/naecs/position/curr.cont.html.)

[13] Sue Bredekamp and Carol Copple, eds., *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs*, Revised Edition (Washington, DC: NAEYC, 1997), 21.

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the context of their everyday activities. (Formal assessment, in contrast, features the use of standardized instruments.) As a general rule, experts agree that informal methods should be used to assess young children.[14] There are, however, two potential exceptions to this position. First, most child development experts believe that formal instruments should be used to screen children for disabilities and developmental delays and to conduct diagnostic evaluations. Second, and more controversially, some hold that standardized achievement tests may serve as an important program tools, provided that they are not used to assess individual children.

[14] See, for example, Lorrie Shepard, Sharon Lynn Kagan, and Emily Wurtz, eds., *Principles and Recommendations for Early Childhood Assessments* (Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel, 1998).

National Leader Survey

While early childhood experts share a general consensus regarding the importance of informal assessment, disagreements remain concerning the precise components of an optimal assessment system. To provide a detailed understanding of how representative experts view specific assessment and assessment-related practices, Erikson Institute conducted an opinion survey of 25 national leaders selected for their expertise and prominence in the early childhood field. These surveys asked respondents to identify the most important components of an assessment system that would be suitable for four-year-old children enrolled in a Head Start or similar program. They were also asked to rate the importance of each using a five-point scale and to indicate the frequency with which each component should be used.

Potential components were defined broadly, to include both familiar types of formal and informal assessment as well as other practices that might form an important part of an overall assessment system. These included developmental screening tests, standardized achievement tests, portfolios, checklists, anecdotal records, work sheets, computerized work sheets, parent evaluations, matched curriculum and assessment, teacher meetings, consultants and case studies, and program self-study. In addition, respondents were asked to list any other items that they believed should be included in the proposed assessment system and rate them according to the same criteria.

Eighteen of the 25 surveys were completed. Of these, seventeen were completed by means of a 20–40 minute telephone interview. (One respondent preferred to respond in writing.) This interview format allowed respondents to clarify their understanding of survey questions, elaborate on them, and freely comment on the issues raised.

The final list of respondents included 13 professors and research professionals, four directors of early childhood research centers, three directors of early childhood professional organizations, and three directors of key divisions of those organizations. (This total exceeds the number of respondents due to individual holdings of dual positions.) A full list of survey respondents is included in Appendix I.

Survey Findings

Table 1 summarizes the views of the early childhood experts who rated the various assessment components listed in the survey on a scale from 1 (low importance) to 5 (high importance).[15] Components are listed according to the average score that they received, moving from most to least important.

[15]Two respondents felt that their views would be better expressed through direct commentary, and consequently did not provide ratings. Other respondents did not rate every item.

As can be seen in Table 1, these national leaders considered having a curriculum model that is directly linked to the assessment of child skills and knowledge to be the most important element of an assessment system, with an average ranking of 4.8 out of 5. This prioritization of matching the assessment system to the curriculum is in line with long-standing NAEYC-NAECS/SDE guidelines, which similarly list the integration of curriculum and assessment as the number one principle for a developmentally appropriate system.[16]

[16]Bredekamp and Rosegrant, *Reaching Potentials*, 23.

Notably, the next two most highly ranked components of an assessment system were not assessment instruments per se, but rather activities designed to support their use and interpretation. Specifically, both teacher meetings and monitoring self-study received an average ranking of 4.4.

Although teacher meetings would not necessarily be formally described as part of an assessment system, most experts agreed that they are important to it, as well as to the overall quality of a program. Several respondents stated that they consider teacher meetings to be significant to the assessment process because they provide teachers with a means of sharing information regarding particular children on an as needed basis. Others alternatively stressed the importance of teacher meetings for program development.

Of the 14 experts who indicated how often they thought meetings should occur, a solid majority (9) stated weekly. As one pointed out, however, teachers commonly lack the time to meet as frequently as they should and may need assistance in using such time to its best advantage.

Program self-study was viewed as an important element of program evaluation, which was in turn seen as a vital complement to a child assessment

Table 1. Expert Survey of Most Important Characteristics of an Assessment System

Components	Importance (mean score)	Frequency							
		N	AN	D/O	W	M	Q	S	A
Matched curric./assessment	4.8	0	0	12	0	0	1	0	0
Teacher meetings	4.4	0	0	0	9	3	2	0	0
Monitoring self-study	4.4	0	0	3	0	1	1	4	4
Portfolios	4.3	0	0	6	7	1	0	0	0
Dev. Screening	4.1	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	12
Parent evaluations	4.1	1	0	0	0	0	7	7	1
Teacher anecdotal records	3.7	2	2	7	2	1	2	0	0
Teacher checklists	3.5	1	0	0	3	3	6	2	1
Consultants and case studies	3.2	0	9	0	0	1	1	1	1
Standardized tests	1.7	10	0	0	0	0	0	2	4
Work sheets	1.1	13	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Computerized work sheets	1.1	9	0	0	1	2	0	0	0

Key

Importance: rated on a scale from 1 (least) to 5 (most)

Frequency: N (never), AN (as needed), D/O (daily or ongoing), W (weekly), M (monthly), Q (quarterly), S (semi-annually), or A (annually)

Note: The combined total of frequencies varies because some respondents chose not to respond to certain items.

system. Several experts emphasized the importance of achieving accreditation in conjunction with the self-study process. Eight of the thirteen who commented on the issue of frequency believed that self-study should be done semiannually or annually, with opinion evenly split between the two.

With regard to assessment instruments, portfolios were rated the most highly, with an average ranking of 4.3. (A commonly used assessment tool, portfolios collect selected samples of children's work and activities to document ongoing learning and development.)

There were some cautions and dissents, however, from this generally positive view. The strongest criticism of portfolios came from one expert who claimed that they cannot be scored and are limited in terms of what they could include. (Others, it should be noted, disagree on both counts.) Although it is possible for teachers to expand the range of portfolio materials beyond writings, drawings, and other easily collectable materials by taking pictures of relevant activities, this is, he argued, "expensive and tedious for the teacher." In addition, teachers need to be trained to be able to recognize what materials represent a

developmental leap forward and merit inclusion. Even with strict guidelines to regulate their proper use, portfolios are, he concluded, only "marginally useful" for this age group.

Several other experts expressed milder reservations about portfolios. Two were concerned that "teachers must have a lot of training to know how to use them properly," with one adding that she consequently "wouldn't mandate them" for use system-wide. Another stated that their "utility depends on the particular subject," while someone else felt that they needed to be linked to anecdotal records in order to be meaningful.

Despite these reservations and dissents, however, portfolios were generally rated exceptionally highly, with 13 out of 14 experts indicating that they should be used on an ongoing daily or weekly basis.

After portfolios, developmental screening and parent evaluations were the most highly rated assessment instruments. A substantial majority of experts surveyed believed that individualized screening for disabilities and developmental delays should be done annually, with several adding that it should also be provided on an as needed basis if potential problems are indicated.[17]

[17]This view is consistent with Head Start Performance Standards, which require that all children entering a Head Start program be screened for developmental, sensory, and behavioral concerns in order to identify those in need of formal diagnostic assessment.

Three experts disagreed with this blanket approach, however, holding that screening should only be done in cases where teachers have observed potential problems. One explained this position by stating that the accuracy of screening tests is very low, with many yielding no better than randomized results. (Again, others would disagree with this contention.) Another stated that it would be preferable to use an observational instrument geared to point about 20 percent of children on to formal screening.

This faith in the ability of teachers to identify children in need of screening through observational assessment was not uniformly shared, however. One expert, for example, stated that "reliance on teacher observation is not sufficient," and recommended a "multi-stage screening process" to be conducted in conjunction with universal school readiness assessments.

Four experts emphasized that screening tests are appropriate for screening only and should never be used for other purposes. While this view is consistent with that of the larger profession, it is widely recognized that screening instruments are frequently inappropriately used as a general child assessment tool (as opposed to a limited screening device).

Parent evaluations were ranked at the same level of importance as developmental screens. Among the 13 respondents who ranked parent evaluations at

the 4–5 level of importance, however, precisely what was meant by that term varied considerably. For example, while one expert held that "ideally, both formal and informal methods should be used," another believed that parent evaluations of their children should be informal, qualitative, and focused on specific behaviors. Another recommended focusing on the parents themselves, with information being gathered on a voluntary basis at the beginning of the program year to assess their "level of functioning, educational background, child rearing strategies, and so on."

On a similar note, another respondent suggested that it is "useful, but difficult to have people who work with parents on family issues engaged with those who work with their children." Such a connection is useful in that it allows teachers to learn about crises that are occurring in children's homes and better understand why the behavior of these children may be suddenly changing. These collaborations are difficult, however, in that they involve professionals who are not used to working together and may have different attitudes towards parents.

Not everyone, however, shared this generally positive view. One respondent, for example, viewed parent evaluations as "biased" and "not so important." Another saw them as so uninformative that they are not worth doing at all. Overall, however, the vast majority (14 out of 16) agreed that they should be conducted more than once a year, with half suggesting quarterly and half semiannually.

Expert opinion regarding the utility of anecdotal records was divided. Although the average ranking of the importance of this instrument was 3.7, opinion was relatively polarized, with five experts ranking them to be of no to moderate importance, and ten seeing them who as important or very important.

Two recommended never using them, with one commenting that they are "incredibly unreliable." Another stated that "most are not useful for assessment" and that a "more systematic approach is better." Two others commented that while anecdotal records may be "helpful for teachers with minimal training and education," they should not be seen as a true assessment instrument. Many others disagreed, however, with nine out of sixteen believing that they should be kept on a daily or weekly basis.

Checklists were, on average, considered to be of moderate importance (3.5 on a 5 point scale). As in the case of portfolios, several respondents emphasized that teacher training is needed to use these instruments properly. One stated that checklists are "fraught with problems" as it is difficult for teachers

to use them "in an objective, reliable way." If "ideally not such a good system," however, they are, "in practical terms, relatively easy to do."

While other experts agreed that checklists are relatively easy to use, what they made of this fact varied. One respondent felt that this recommended them, particularly for a simple pre/post test. Another described them as "helpful for teachers with minimal education and training," as they "help them to organize their observations." Two, however, felt that they were too simple, particularly if scored according to a yes/no format. These experts preferred some type of more detailed developmental scale, which, one added, "is much better for picking up individual differences, particularly for kids over two." Opinions were similarly varied regarding how frequently checklists should be used, with the median response being "quarterly," but the extremes ranging from "never" to "weekly."

Experts surveyed generally consider having consultants available to assist teachers in working with individual children with special needs or concerns to be of moderate importance (3.2 on a 5-point scale). Most (9 out of 13) indicate that such consultants should be used on an as needed basis. One cautioned, however, that it is "hard to get people who are really skilled to help teachers." Further, two agreed that the utility of such assistance depends very much on the specific situation, with one commenting that the targeted problem "needs to be very concrete."

Notably, a substantial majority of the early childhood leaders surveyed considered administered standardized tests to be of little importance, with 10 out of 16 stating that they should never be used in preschool programs. Further, of the six who felt that they could be useful, all agreed that they should be used strictly for program evaluation, as opposed to individualized child assessment.

While the view that standardized tests should not be used for the assessment of individual children is consistent with that of the larger profession, there was substantial disagreement regarding whether they could be used for program evaluation purposes. Two respondents, for example, took an unequivocal stance against the use of standardized tests with preschool children, holding that they are consistently unreliable for this age group. Informal assessment methods, both agreed, should be used for program accountability purposes instead. "There are many reasons to be leery of these tests," one added. "To the extent that they are integrated into the assessment system, using tests says to the teacher that what you really care about is direct instruction."

At the other end of the spectrum, one respondent stated that standardized tests were "important" to the program evaluation process. Using standardized

tests to determine program accountability, he suggested, could be done by means of a district-wide sample and a pre/post design. Using the tests in this way, he believes, avoids the potential problem of "teaching to the test." Further, he contended, standardized tests work well when used strictly as general indicators of program quality. Research shows, for example, that children enrolled in model preschool programs typically make a one-half to full standard deviation gain on any standardized achievement test used.

Several other experts also suggested using a random sample of children, as this method helps to prevent test results from being used inappropriately. Another cautioned, however, that "sampling is difficult at this age." This respondent further questioned the viability of this method by stating that she "doesn't trust program staff to administer individualized standardized tests," which require expertise to use properly. However, employing experts to administer tests may be prohibitively expensive.

Worksheets and computerized worksheets were commonly considered to be unimportant and, in many cases, undesirable by interviewees, with both receiving an average ranking of only 1.1. In both cases, however, opinions ranged from strongly opposing their use under all circumstances to believing that they are of some limited utility, depending on how they are employed. No one, however, recommended making them part of an assessment system per se.

Although teacher training and supervision were not listed as potential components of an assessment system on the original survey, six respondents indicated that they considered both to be very important in this regard. Two experts stated that training should be provided semiannually, while two more said that supervision should occur on a weekly basis.

One expert commented that it is critical to know "how much time and effort it takes for teachers to learn how to use different instruments and methods appropriately." Another stated that training "should be adjusted to their level of previous preparation." One respondent alternatively emphasized the importance of teacher mentoring, as "teachers learn the most through peer interaction." Others stressed the importance of ongoing supervision. "There needs to be some way of checking to see if teachers are doing their assessments in a systematic way," one commented. "Training is necessary, but not sufficient."

Three respondents added that they believe that the goal of school readiness should be factored in as an important part of an assessment system. One emphasized that this should be understood in terms of the community's

definition of school readiness—that is, what teachers, school districts, and others expect children to have accomplished by the time that they are entering kindergarten. The two other experts who brought up the issue of school readiness pointed out that measuring school readiness also serves as a means of determining program accountability, with one stating that "longitudinally, instruments used to assess school readiness are as good as achievement tests for predicting school success."

Several experts had other concerns regarding preschool assessment issues. Two emphasized that all assessment instruments and procedures must be culturally and linguistically appropriate. Another stressed that it is "impossible to develop an assessment system that serves all purposes equally well—there will necessarily be trade-offs." Consequently, there must first be a "clear prioritization of assessment purposes" before decisions can be made regarding which instruments and methods are best to use.

Another suggested that political realities should be kept in mind when deciding what sort of assessment system to design. Policymakers, she believes, need to have documentation of what elements of programs result in children making progress over time. Consequently, she suggests making a database with unique identifiers for children that will follow them throughout at least several subsequent years of schooling. Although this advice runs counter to the long-standing concern of experts in the early childhood field that such information will be misused, she believes that its political importance demands that a way be found to produce it while maintaining necessary safeguards.

In contrast, another respondent expressed strong reservations about assessment in general, particularly with regard to low-income minority children. She cautioned against the use of child standards, stating that "children should be allowed to develop at their own pace without the pressure of standards, which conflict with individual rates of development." Similarly, "assessments should evaluate the progress of programs and impact of teachers, not whether children are developing according to some average rate":

> *Many children, and particularly African American and language minority children, come to programs with limited experiences and delayed development. We must insure that we are teaching children before we test. Otherwise, we are only testing what they have been exposed to, and not what they are capable of learning, which may lead to low expectations and continued stifling of their potential.*

Again, however, most early childhood experts have moved away from such a blanket condemnation of standards, believing that they can be useful if they are developmentally appropriate and aligned with a high-quality curriculum and assessment system.

Summary

Although there were many important differences of opinion among the national early childhood education leaders surveyed, there were also a few areas of consensus, and several more where a single perspective clearly prevailed. Looked at in the aggregate, key findings of this survey include the following:

- The first priority of an assessment system should be to forge a strong and useful connection between program curriculum and the assessment of child skills and knowledge.
- Weekly teacher meetings are important, particularly for program development and the monitoring of individual cases.
- Teacher training and supervision are critical, but must be tailored to fit particular needs.
- Monitoring self-study for program evaluation purposes should be conducted on an annual or semiannual basis.
- Student portfolios are recommended for use on a daily or weekly basis, as long as there is an awareness of their content limitations and teacher training requirements.
- Screening for disabilities and developmental delays should be conducted annually and supplemented by ongoing teacher observations.
- Parents should be involved in the assessment process, with relevant information collected from them at least biannually.
- The value of anecdotal records depends on the level of teacher training and the way in which they are integrated into the larger assessment system.
- Teacher checklists are useful resources, but should be developmentally scaled if they are to be used for assessment purposes.

- Standardized tests should not be used with preschoolers, except perhaps for program evaluation purposes.
- Worksheets and computerized worksheets should not be part of an assessment system.

Prekindergarten Survey

The second survey conducted by Erikson Institute examined child assessment practices in state-funded prekindergarten programs across the country. Like the national leader survey, this study collected information on a wide range of assessment and assessment-related practices. As such, it represents the most detailed study of assessment practices at the prekindergarten level to date.

Although existing studies have carefully documented the trend first towards and then away from the inappropriate use of screening and readiness tests among kindergarten children during the 1980–90s, relatively little attention has been directed towards the evolution of assessment practices at the prekindergarten level.[18] While excellent information has been compiled on other aspects of state-funded prekindergarten programs, including their size, enrollment criteria, percentage of eligible children served, annual budgets, costs per child, class size, health and social services, administrative structures, teacher qualifications, and hours of operation, data on specific assessment practices have been limited to the existence of program standards, accreditation requirements, and external monitoring procedures.[19]

Presumably, this lack of attention to prekindergarten assessment has been a function of the need to focus attention on the tremendous problems associated with the high-stakes kindergarten testing that was common in the 1980s and the absence of a comparably pressing concern on the prekindergarten front. Given, however, the growing concern with preprimary assessment, it is likely to become a subject of much more careful study in the future.

State-funded prekindergarten programs provide a good indicator of the state of prekindergarten assessment practices as a whole, as they reflect the national diversity of approaches to early childhood education. In this study, "state-funded prekindergarten programs" were defined as early education programs for children ages three to five that are supported by state funds and conform to a basic preschool format, with a stable body of students, educational curriculum, and daily operating schedule. State-funded Head Start programs, state-funded special education programs, and early intervention services for chil-

[18] Two major studies of early childhood assessment practices that include information on prekindergarten programs have been conducted: M. T. Gnezda and R. Bolig, "A National Survey of Public School Testing of Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Children," paper prepared for the National Forum on the Future of Children and Families and the National Association of State Boards of Education, 1988; and Lorrie S. Shepard, Grace A. Taylor, and Sharon L. Kagan, "Trends in Early Childhood Assessment Policies and Practices," *www.negp.gov/Reports/ecms2.pdf*, 1996. While Shepard et al. primarily focus on kindergarten assessment practices, they provide a general benchmark of the state of prekindergarten assessment in the mid–1990s.

[19] Schulman et al., *Seeds of Success*; Anne Mitchell, Carol Ripple, and Nina Chanana, *Prekindergarten Programs Funded by the States: Essential Elements for Policy Makers* (New York: Families and Work Institute, 1998); Anne Mitchell, "Prekindergarten Programs in the States: Trends and Issues," (Climax, NY: Early Childhood Policy Research, 2001); Carol H. Ripple, Walter S. Gilliam, Nina Chananna, and Edward Zigler, "Will Fifty Cooks Spoil the Broth: The Debate Over Entrusting Head Start to the States," *American Psychologist* 54, no. 5 (May 1999), 327–343; Education Commission of the States' Online Interactive Prekindergarten Database, *http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/27/24/2724.htm*.

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dren with disabilities were not included in this study. Similarly, state-directed use of federal funds for early childhood services, such as through the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program, were not considered.

Introductory letters with attached surveys were distributed via mail or e-mail to early childhood specialists in state departments of education or other equivalent professionals in each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia.[20] Surveys asked respondents to indicate assessment instruments and related practices used, in the categories of developmental screening, standardized tests, portfolios, anecdotal records, checklists, worksheets and computerized worksheets, parent evaluations, matched curriculum and assessment, teacher meetings, consultants and case studies, program self-study, and other.

Survey recipients were given the option of responding in writing or by means of a telephone interview. Data for 24 of the 36 existing programs were gathered by telephone, 8 by mail or e-mail, and 4 had no response.[21]

Currently, 35 states and the District of Columbia fund the type of classroom-based prekindergarten program targeted by this study.[22] These include Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

[20] Survey recipients were identified by four means: 1) the NAECS/SDE membership list, 2) the state contact persons listed in Schulman et al.'s (1999) summary of state prekindergarten initiatives, 3) state department of education or other early childhood program websites, and 4) referrals from individuals contacted via the above means.

[21] The four states with no response were Minnesota, New Jersey, South Carolina, and Virginia. Information presented on these states was taken from their state department of education websites, as well as external expert knowledge.

[22] For information on other state-funded early childhood initiatives, see Schulman et al., *Seeds of Success*.

Survey Findings

Table 2 summarizes the key data collected in this survey. This table lists each of the 35 states (and the District of Columbia) that have state-funded prekindergarten programs. In each case, it indicates whether they mandate, recommend, or commonly use the assessment instruments and related practices itemized on the survey.

Notably, this information is not available for the 11 states that place assessment entirely under local control (Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Texas, West Virginia, and Wisconsin). To clearly differentiate their status, these states are shaded in gray on the chart. Beyond this, the District of Columbia, Michigan, New Jersey, and Virginia had only very limited information available concerning their prekindergarten assessment practices. The remaining 21 states, however, were able to provide reasonably detailed information regarding their current procedures.

Table 2. Assessment Systems—State-funded Prekindergarten Programs (2001)

Key
M = mandated
R = recommended
C = commonly used

State	Dev. Screening	Stand. Tests	Portfolios	Checklists	Anecdotal Records
Alabama					
Arizona			R	R	R
Arkansas			M	R	R
California				M	
Colorado	M		C	C	C
Connecticut	M		C	C	
Delaware	M			C	
DC				R	
Florida					
Georgia			C	C	M
Illinois	M		R	R	R
Iowa	C		C	C	C
Kansas	M		M	M	M
Kentucky					
Louisiana	M		R	R	
Maine					
Maryland	M		R	R	R
Massachusetts					
Michigan					
Minnesota	R		R	R	R
Missouri			R	M	C
Nebraska	M		C	C	C
New Jersey					
New Mexico	M		M		M
New York					
Ohio	M			M	R
Oklahoma					
Pennsylvania					
South Carolina	M		C	C	C
Tennessee	C		M	M	M
Texas					
Vermont	M	C	C	C	C
Virginia					
Washington	M		C	C	C
West Virginia					
Wisconsin					
Total 36	16 [M-13; R-1; C-2]	1 [C-1]	18 [M-4; R-6; C-8]	21 [M-5; R-7; C-9]	17 [M-4; R-6; C-8]

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Matched curriculum/ assessment	Parent Evaluations	Teacher Meetings	Program Self-Study	Other/Notes
				External program evaluations—M
			R	
	M		M	
R	M	M	R	Semi-annual external review—M
C				
				All locally controlled
M		M		External program evaluations—M
R		C	M	
C	C	C	C	
				All locally controlled
M				
				All locally controlled
M			M	
				All locally controlled
			M	Informal assessment—R
R		R		
M			R	
M	M	C	M	
				Informal assessment—R
M	M	M		
				Assessment—M (local choice)
M				
				All locally controlled
				All locally controlled
	C	C		
				All locally controlled
C			M	
				No information available
C	M	C	M	
				All locally controlled
				All locally controlled
14 [M-7; R-3; C-4]	7 [M-5; C-2]	9 [M-3; R-1; C-5]	11 [M-7; R-3; C-1]	

Several key findings emerge from these and other survey data. On the positive side, these findings include 1) the growing use of developmentally appropriate informal assessment techniques and 2) the increased number of relatively structured state-mandated assessment systems based on this method. More problematically, however, the survey also demonstrates that assessment systems in state-funded prekindergarten programs frequently 1) lack a systematic link between curriculum and assessment and 2) fail to utilize important support mechanisms, such as parent evaluations, teacher meetings, and program self-study.

Finding 1. THE USE OF DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE INFORMAL ASSESSMENT METHODS IN STATE-FUNDED PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS HAS SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASED. In 1996, Shepard et al. reported that "almost all state-mandated standardized testing for purposes of school accountability had been eliminated for children below grade 3."[23] At the same time, they found, there was a growing interest in "new forms of assessment," such as teacher observation and portfolios. At that time, however, most of the momentum to implement such informal assessment procedures was confined to the district or school level. Missouri, they reported, was the only state that was developing an assessment system based on informal methods at the prekindergarten level (Project Construct). A central obstacle to the more widespread use of informal assessment was that many teachers and other early education professionals simply did not understand it, as they had never been trained in developmentally appropriate assessment techniques.[24]

[23]This study does not specify the extent to which standardized tests were used in state-funded prekindergarten programs. Nor is this information is available elsewhere. We presume, however, that most of these programs were not systematically assessing prekindergarten children at the time that this research was conducted.

[24]Shepard et al., "Trends in Early Childhood Assessment Policies and Practices," 7–12.

The findings of this survey indicate that the use of informal assessment has increased significantly during the past five years. Eleven states require the use of what is commonly referred to as "authentic" or "developmentally appropriate" assessment in their prekindergarten programs (Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Washington). In addition, six other states mandate the use of particular informal assessment instruments, such as portfolios, checklists, and anecdotal records. These include California, Illinois (pilot beginning fall 2001), Kansas, Nebraska (protocol under development), New Mexico, and Tennessee. Further, an additional eight states report that such instruments are either recommended or commonly used in their programs (Arizona, Delaware, District of Columbia, Iowa, New Jersey, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Vermont). In sum, almost 70 percent of the 36 existing state-funded prekindergarten programs

mandate, recommend, or commonly use informal assessment as a central part of their overall child assessment and program evaluation systems.

Only one state, Vermont, reported that standardized achievement tests are used in its prekindergarten program. This practice, however, is essentially a holdover from an earlier era and does not represent what the state Department of Education considers to be a preferred practice.[25]

[25]Ten years ago, the Vermont Department of Education mandated that prekindergarten programs that were part of their state-funded Early Education Initiative had to test on a pre/post basis using either the Battelle Developmental Inventory, Brigance Comprehensive Inventory of Basic Skills, Child Development Inventory, or Child Development Profile. Several years ago, the department added the Work Sampling System and High/Scope Child Observation Record to this set of choices. Currently, more experienced teachers in the system overwhelmingly favor the use of these alternative instruments. Less experienced teachers, however, tend to prefer formal tests.

Finding 2. A GROWING NUMBER OF STATES HAVE ESTABLISHED RELATIVELY STRUCTURED ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS THAT ARE BASED ON THE USE OF INFORMAL METHODS. Beyond the simple requirement that informal assessment methods be used, a significant number of states either mandate or are in the process of implementing relatively elaborate systems that are built upon the use of informal assessment techniques. Based on a comparative examination of the data, these systems are defined as those that mandate the use of at least two particular informal assessment techniques or that require training in such methods. States that meet these criteria include Arkansas, California, Georgia, Kansas, Maryland, Missouri, New Mexico, and Ohio. In addition, Illinois will launch such a pilot program in fall 2001.

Specifically, the central features of each of these state-funded prekindergarten assessment systems are as follows:

The *Arkansas Better Chance (ABC)* program requires the use of portfolios and recommends the use of anecdotal records, as well as the Arkansas Early Childhood Education Framework Developmental Rating Scale for Three- and Four-Year-Old Children. Teachers are required to attend at least one training session on the use of portfolios and anecdotal records annually, with additional trainings provided by Arkansas State University on an ongoing basis.

Beginning with the 2001–02 fiscal year, the *California State Preschool Program* will require the use of the Desired Results for Children and Families assessment system developed by the California Department of Education (CDE). For prekindergarten programs, this system will require semiannual use of the Desired Results Developmental Profile (a developmental checklist); annual use of the Desired Results Parent Survey; and an annual self-assessment. (The Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) is being considered as a mandated instrument, as it is required every four years in an external CDE compliance review). In addition, the University of California, Los Angeles, is developing a training component for the system for use with state administrators, program directors, teachers, and other early education professionals.

The *Georgia Prekindergarten Program for Four-Year-Olds* mandates the use of anecdotal records and a curriculum-based assessment method selected from a set of approved models. Portfolios are commonly used in conjunction

with teacher checklists. Standardized tests are not recommended and must be approved for use by the state Office of School Readiness.

The Kansas State Department of Education mandates the use of the Work Sampling System for portfolios, checklists, and anecdotal records in its *At-Risk Four-Year-Old Preschool Program*. During summer 2001, all teachers in this program were required to attend a two-day training on the Work Sampling System provided by licensed trainers for that product (Rebus, Inc.). If sufficient funding is available, the state DOE will mandate that all new teachers also receive this training, which will be provided once annually.

Data from the Work Sampling System Developmental Checklist were used in the program's 2000 Evaluation Report, which found that children who completed the program entered kindergarten with a significantly greater degree of proficiency in the domains of Personal and Social Development, Language and Literacy, and Physical Development than those in a comparison group.[26]

The stated policy of the *Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR) Prekindergarten Program* is that "assessments of young children should use a variety of methods, including performance-based assessments, systematic and ongoing observations, and a collection of young children's work over time."[27] In keeping with this position, the MMSR strongly recommends the use of the Work Sampling System in its prekindergarten program and requires it in its kindergarten program. The Work Sampling System's performance indicators are aligned with the state standards specified in its primary assessment outcomes and indicators guide.

In addition, the MMSR provides a nine-day training session over a period of two years for prekindergarten, kindergarten, and preschool special education teachers from 19 counties and the city of Baltimore. This training focuses on the use of teacher observation, portfolios, ongoing performance assessment, parent communications, and information sharing with primary grade teachers and instructional specialists, and curriculum development. Finally, the MMSR, like the Kansas program, has used data from the Work Sampling System to evaluate the effect of its prekindergarten program on school readiness.[28]

The *Missouri Preschool Project* requires programs to document student progress using developmentally appropriate assessment tools. The Student Observation Checklist, development by the Missouri Department of Education, is required annually. In conjunction with this requirement, all teachers and teachers' aides are required to attend a one-day training on observational assessment every year. In addition, programs must use one of three curriculum models: Project Construct, High/Scope, or the Creative Curriculum. Most programs use Project Construct, which is based on constructivist theory and was developed by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in 1986. Portfolios are recommended and commonly used as a part of the Project Construct curriculum.

Ohio's *Indicators of Success Project* mandates use of the Galileo assessment instrument, a computer-based system with screening, lesson and activity planning, observational assessment, and outcome documentation components. Galileo includes a required developmental checklist and optional anecdotal

[26]Dr. Sherrill Martinez, "2000 Evaluation Report: KSDE Study of Programs for At-Risk Four-Year-Olds–The Work Sampling System Developmental Checklist Section," *www.ksde.org/prel/8datris kreport.htm*, p. 6.

[27]MMSR "Vision and Belief Statement," *http://mdk12.org/practices/ensure/mmsr/vision_belief.html*.

[28]Maryland State Department of Education, "School Readiness Baseline Information Preliminary Report, School Year 2000-01," *www.msde.state.md.us/Special%20Reports%20and%20Data/KindergartenReport/index.html*.

records and portfolio features. It is aligned with standards established by the Ohio early childhood primary connections curriculum guide, as well as with Head Start performance standards. In addition to the use of Galileo, programs are encouraged to receive NAEYC accreditation.

In fall 2001, Illinois will pilot its Early Learning Standards, in conjunction with a version of the Work Sampling System that will be aligned with them (as well as with Head Start Performance Standards), in 30 prekindergarten programs across the state. In addition, the State Board of Education will increase the availability of teacher trainings in the use of the Work Sampling System and continue to offer trainings for High/Scope and the Creative Curriculum.

In sum, eight states have relatively structured assessment systems that are built on the use of informal methods, and one state is piloting that approach. In contrast, twelve states place assessment entirely under local control. The increased parity of these figures indicates that an important shift has occurred in assessment practices in state-funded prekindergarten programs since the mid–1990s, towards a greater use of informal assessment and more highly structured systems based on the same.

Finding 3. ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS IN STATE-FUNDED PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS GENERALLY LACK A SYSTEMATIC LINK BETWEEN CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT. As discussed above, the national leaders in the early childhood field surveyed for this project regarded the linkage between curriculum and assessment to be the most important aspect of an assessment system. Merely 39 percent of the states surveyed, however, reported that such a connection is mandated, recommended, or common in their prekindergarten assessment system(s). (This figure rises to 56 percent when only the 25 states that do not leave assessment decisions to the local level are considered.) This suggests that while the practice of informal assessment has expanded significantly over the last five years, there is not a widespread understanding that assessment must be integrated with the curriculum and used to inform its development in order to be fully meaningful and effective.

Finding 4. ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS IN STATE-FUNDED PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS COMMONLY FAIL TO UTILIZE IMPORTANT SUPPORT MECHANISMS, SUCH AS PARENT EVALUATIONS, TEACHER MEETINGS, AND PROGRAM SELF-STUDY. As can be seen on Table 2, there is a significant disjuncture between the frequency with which standard informal assessment instruments (i.e., portfolios, checklists, and anecdotal records) and other tools and support mechanisms (i.e., parent evaluations, teacher meetings,

and program self-study) are used. On average, portfolios, checklists, and anecdotal records are used by 75 percent of the 25 state-funded prekindergarten programs that do not leave assessment decisions to the local level. In contrast, parent evaluations, teacher meetings, and program self-study designed to support and improve the assessment system are on average used only 25 percent of the time in these programs.

Once again, this pattern of usage conflicts with the expert opinion on what constitutes a strong assessment system obtained in the national leader survey. On average, the early childhood experts surveyed considered teacher meetings and program self-study to be tied as two of the top three components of an assessment system, second only to the link between curriculum and assessment. In other words, both these support strategies were considered to be more important to the overall quality of the system than any particular assessment instruments, including portfolios, checklists, and anecdotal records. Similarly, parent evaluations were considered to be as important as developmental screening, and more important than checklists and anecdotal records.

Conclusion

On the most critical issues, the data gathered from the two surveys found an encouraging congruence between expert opinion and state practice. Most notably, almost 70 percent of state-funded prekindergarten programs mandate, recommend, or commonly use informal assessment techniques, which are consistently recommended by early childhood experts. (The 30 percent of state-funded prekindergarten programs that leave assessment decisions to the district or local level have no information available on common practices.) In addition, 22 percent of state-funded prekindergarten programs have relatively structured assessment systems, which either mandate the use of at least two informal assessment techniques or require training in informal assessment methods. This represents a significant change from the mid-1990s, when Missouri was the only state developing specific guidelines or instruments based on informal assessment methods for use in its prekindergarten program.

As the results of the early childhood expert opinion survey demonstrate, however, the quality of an assessment system depends on well its various components fit together, as well as its overall level of support. Even the best assessment instruments will not be useful unless they are linked to the curriculum, complemented by other appropriate tools, and supported by teacher training,

program evaluation, and parent communications. For this reason, it is important to think of assessment as a comprehensive system that is fully integrated into the larger program structure, as opposed to a discrete set of particular tools and methods.

On this score, evidence from the field is mixed. On the one hand, there is a troubling disjuncture between the preeminent value that national leaders in the early childhood field place on matching curriculum to assessment and the fact that only 39 percent of states report that this is being done in their prekindergarten programs. Similarly, the high degree of importance that early childhood experts attach to assessment support strategies such as parent evaluations, teacher meetings, and program self-study is not reflected by their relatively low degree of usage in the field.

At the same time, however, the fact that four states include teacher training as a key component of the assessment system is an encouraging sign that there is a growing awareness that once developmentally appropriate methods are established, they must be supported with adequate resources and training. The quality of teacher-generated assessments is necessarily dependent on the ability of teachers to make informed judgments about individual children's learning and development. This requires education and training, not to mention time to reflect, and record, update, and analyze assessment data.

As our society begins to demand more comprehensive assessment data from our early childhood care and education programs—as well as greater educational gains at a younger age, even for educationally disadvantaged children—we hope that we will also begin to realize that these programs need adequate resources to pursue this enormously important yet highly challenging task. Higher educational expectations and more exacting assessment requirements have the potential to stress children and teachers without achieving worthwhile gains if they are not well-conceived, well-implemented, and well-maintained. These surveys suggest the while significant gains have been made with regard to elevating the general level of knowledge regarding developmentally appropriate assessment practices in state-funded prekindergarten programs across the country, there is still a pressing need to refine this understanding to include the view that assessment must be understood as a comprehensive system, which is linked to the curriculum and supported by proper resources and procedures.

Appendix: Interview List, National Leader Survey

Larry Aber
Director, National Center for Children in Poverty
Professor, Psychology and Public Health
Columbia University
New York, NY

Steve Barnett
Director, Center for Early Education
Professor, Graduate School of Education
Rutgers University
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Susan Bredekamp
Director of Research
Council for Professional Recognition
Washington, DC

Donna Bryant
Senior Scientist
Frank Potter Graham Child Development Center
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
Chapel Hill, NC

Diane Dodge
President
Teacher Strategies, Inc.
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Linda Espinosa
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University of Missouri, Columbia
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Herb Ginsberg
Professor of Psychology and Education
Teachers College
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Stacie Goffin
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Project to Reinvent NAEYC Accreditation
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Tom Schultz
Director, Program Support Division
Head Start Bureau
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Larry Schweinhart
Chair, Research Division
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Catherine Snow
Henry Lee Shattuck Professor of Education
Harvard University
Cambridge, MA

Kathy Thornburg
Professor
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University of Missouri, Columbia
Columbia, MO

David Weikart
President Emeritus
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Ypsilanti, MI

Edward Zigler
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Yale University
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*Since participating in the survey, Meisels has become president of Erikson Institute.

Herr Research Center at Erikson Institute

The Herr Research Center, established in 1997 with a gift from the Herr family, is the hub of research activities at Erikson Institute. Its mission is the development of knowledge from applied research that contributes to a significant improvement in the quality, effectiveness, and equity of education and services for children and families. The center provides technical assistance and funding for the development and implementation of a wide variety of research projects, promotes the dissemination of research findings, and sponsors conferences and seminars.

Dedicated to addressing the interests and needs of an increasingly diverse society, center-supported research initiatives work with populations that vary in age, race, and ethnicity, with a primary focus on programs and populations in disadvantaged communities. The center is committed to providing a sound and useful base of information to guide the understanding of complex social issues such as changing family and societal needs and families in stress as well as the nature and efficacy of services for children and families.

Current research projects

Caregiving Consensus Groups with Latina Mothers
Children and Violence Project
Computer Training for Early Childhood Teachers Project
Doula Support for Young Mothers Project (in collaboration with the Department of Psychology at the University of Chicago)
Erikson Arts Project
Faculty Development Project on the Brain
Fathers and Families
The Helping Relationship in Early Childhood Interventions Project
The Learning and Teaching Assessment System Project
Project Match
Reggio Emilia Project
Schools Project
Teacher Attitudes About Play
The Unmet Needs Project

Publications available from the Herr Research Center

Applied Research in Child Development Number 1, After School Programs
Applied Research in Child Development Number 2, Father Care
Applied Research in Child Development Number 3, Welfare Reform
"Lessons from Beyond the Service World," Judith S. Musick, Ph.D.
"Harder Than You Think: Determining What Works, for Whom, and Why in Early Childhood Interventions," Jon Korfmacher, Ph.D.

Faculty

Samuel J. Meisels, President, Erikson Institute
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